

Is there a conflict between Religion and Science?

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All thanks and praise is due to Allah. We seek His help and forgiveness, and we seek refuge in Allah from the evil within ourselves and the consequences of our evil deeds. Whoever Allah guides will never be led astray, and whoever Allah leads astray will never find guidance. I bear witness there is no God but Allah, alone without any partners, and I bear witness that Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) is His servant and His Messenger.

Many Muslims would haste to answer this question with a firm and resounding denial. 'Of course not!' they would proudly shout! However, this is not the way true scholars of Islam should respond to such a shrewdly ambiguated question. This is not the way Ahlul Sunnah Waljama'a would deal with such an issue. The proper way to respond to such a question, is to start by asking: What exactly do you mean by 'Religion', and what exactly do you mean by 'science'?

Note, by the way, that this is normally not the way this question is commonly posed among proclaimed intellectuals who usually address it one way or another. Usually they would say: Is there a conflict between 'science' and 'religion'? not 'between religion and science'. Why? Because usually the one addressing the question would raise it from a firm belief that whatever he calls science is the truth, or the ultimate source for knowing any truth about the world whatever, whereas, religion, or anything he would classify as

one, according, of course to his own belief system, would be the one held in question. If it agrees with 'science', whatever that is, then it's good, it's agreeable! If however it doesn't, then those who adhere to it have a serious problem and a profound crisis of faith on their hands, whatever their religion might be!

But then again, as we pointed out earlier, the question, so written, is messed up, since both the terms, 'science' and 'religion' are extremely ambiguous! And as we shall elaborate in this lecture, it's not an innocent ambiguity, or an unintentional equivocation!

In such cases, Ulema' or scholars of Ahlul Sunnah would insist on demanding a clear, unambiguous definition of what exactly is meant in such a question by 'religion', and what exactly is meant by 'science'! They would do that because they know, quite well, how easily a philosopher could engage in all kinds of sophistry, playing with precisely such kind of ambiguity in such questions, in order to win a debate or score a following!

Centuries ago, for example, philosophers posed a trick question asking: 'Can God create a rock He cannot carry'? The question is designed in such a way that no matter how you respond, you'll make it look like there's something that your God cannot do! However, one can clearly see that the question itself is false, because it presupposes a contradiction. Obviously, by 'God' we mean the One and only Being with complete unconditional omnipotence! There's nothing that He cannot do. And thus, it follows logically, that there can be no such thing as a 'Rock He Cannot Carry'. Its existence is, by definition, logically impossible! And so the question is actually thus: Can God do something that is

logically impossible? And the answer is: logical impossibilities are irrelevant to potency or power to begin with. If a being has power, then that being has nothing to do with the impossible! The impossible here means: Something the very existence of which would imply a logical contradiction.

A similar example can be found in an ancient question posed by Islamic philosophers. They once asked: Is man Mukhayar, or Musayar? The word Mukhayar in Arabic could be taken to mean: has a choice. However, it could also be taken to mean: is free to create his own deeds, with no previous predestination whatsoever. The same ambiguity shrouds the other term 'Musayar'. It could be taken to mean 'has no choice', and it could also be taken to mean 'his deeds are predestined (by Allah)'. So obviously, you're doomed if you say yes, and you're doomed if you say no! The ambiguity is detrimental in such a question! And it is exactly how those innovators attempted to trick unsuspecting Muslims into accepting their case! This is why Scholars of Sunnah decreed at the time that it would be an innovation to either claim that man is 'mukhayar' or that he is 'musayar'. Even the word 'Jabr' in Arabic was treated in the same manner. One has to be extremely clear and unambiguous when he speaks of such issues.

In fact, I argue that the same is true of the term 'Free Will' in English. A Muslim should not accept it or dismiss it off hand, without first inquiring about the exact, unambiguous meaning intended by its use. If by free will you mean that we humans have the prerogative and the ability to make free choices of what to say and what to do in this world, then yes of course we do have free will. However, Christian theologians wouldn't use it for such a

meaning. They would take it to mean that human deeds and actions are their own creation! God, in their belief system, does not create human deeds. Whatever we choose to do, good or bad, does not follow His will in any sensible meaning whatsoever! And that's of course false! It defeats an entire pillar of faith in Islam, the belief in Qada' and Qadar or, as the crude English term would go: 'Predestination'. This is an innovation that we call 'Qadareya' in Islam, it's those who believe that Allah didn't actually predetermine anything at all! Some 'Qadareya' would even go further, denying previous knowledge of all human deeds, altogether. Not only does He not create them or will them to be in advance; He doesn't even know them in advance!

So as you can see, Muslims should be extremely careful and wary about the use of words in any context that has to do with belief in Allah. Whenever someone asks you 'do you believe in free will', you have to ask them first to define free will! And if you're still not sure what they mean, then you should ask them to elaborate further and further, until you're perfectly clear! Shikhul Islam Ibnu Taymeyah Rahemahullah is famously quoted to have said that a great majority of all dispute among humans is due to ambiguity.

So let's start by 'religion' in this question. What do you mean by religion? First of all, people's belief systems and doctrines vary greatly and profoundly, so one needs to be very specific about the exact religion they mean! Secondly, and more importantly, one needs to be clear on the definition of religion in this respect, since many people would hold certain beliefs that are indeed religious, or occupy the place of religion in their cognitive structures, without identifying them as such! I do not, for a minute, accept the common

dictionary definition of the word 'religion' as the belief in a particular deity! Buddhists would identify themselves as religious, without ascribing themselves to a deity! Some sects of Hinduism don't even believe in creation to begin with! So what is religion really, and when does a belief qualify as religious? Obviously the popular definition we just mentioned is quite lacking! If we're going to ask whether 'science', whatever that is, conflicts with a particular belief system that we call religion, then we need to be clear what systems qualify as religion and what don't!

I would argue that the best way to define religion is to say that it is a comprehensive system of beliefs about what's beyond this world, if any, and why we are here! The latter, of course, would build upon the former. So if you're, for example, a pantheist, who believes that the world itself is divine, and that the cause for its being is within it, not beyond, then you would believe that there is no Day of Judgment, and that you should internalize the purpose of your life, and the source your of spiritual 'enlightenment'!

The same is true of an atheist who doesn't believe in a supernatural deity! Despite their insistence that what they embrace is not a religion, and that they do not revere any deity; they would, in fact, engage in religious practices without calling them as such! If you believe, for example, that it was nature that created you, and that all credit is due to it alone for keeping you; then you are indeed deifying nature, even if you wouldn't call it a god! It is not uncommon among naturalists to speak of nature as though they were speaking of God! Some, in fact, did use the word 'God' in reference to natural law! One particularly famous example is Albert Einstein! Every time a Darwinian ascribes the act of selection to

nature, they are indeed ascribing a godly attribute to it, in what is supposed to take the place of teleological beliefs in theistic religions!

Those who believe that there is no Day of Judgment, and that once we die we just vanish out of existence, they do embrace a religious belief as such, every bit as much as those who believe in the resurrection! Perhaps some people would refrain from calling it a 'belief' since they would not regard it with the same amount of certainty and absolution that adherents to theistic religions would, but this does not change the typology of the belief itself! A belief could be strong or weak, but it would still be your religion!

A belief in God could be negative; a stance of denial or rejection, but it would still classify as belief nonetheless, and it would still take the seat of religion all the same! I mean, look at what someone like Richard Dawkins is doing these days, publishing books to praise the aesthetic beauty and spiritual fulfillment he feels in atheism, even doing his best to teach his beliefs to children! Look at that man and tell me, honestly, that you really don't see a religious preacher, and an extremist at that!

A belief system doesn't need to have scripture and prophecy, or even a formal institution or house of worship to classify as a religion! Just look at the type of questions it purports to answer, and the type of commitment it takes from those who embrace those answers, and you will see exactly what others would call a religion!

The point we're making here is that, regardless of whether or not you embrace a particular deity, you will be a slave to something

that takes up the place of a deity in your life no matter what you would call it! And regardless of whether or not you declare commitment and submission to a particular type of worship, you will, in fact, act every bit as though you were worshiping something, one way or another, no matter how godless you would like to think of yourself! This is why in the Quran, Allah does not identify atheists as a third, additional party to those who worship him (Muahedeen) and those who worship whatever else (Mushrekeen)! A man is either Muahed (one who worships Him alone) or Mushrik (one who worships other things besides Him). It makes no difference how you would identify yourself, if, in fact, your deeds would classify you as a Mushrik! You may be doing things that you would not call “Shrik” when in fact they are! What matters is the true meaning of the deed, not the one you claim it to have!

This is why when the mushriks of Quraish claimed that they only worshipped their idols to bring them near to Allah, to favor them to Him, He condemned them for that claim in no uncertain terms in the Quran! How can a reasonable person even begin to assume that the Lord almighty would approve of His creatures asking of each other things that should only be asked of Him, revering each other in a manner that is only worthy of Him, thereby raising them to a level of equality or partnership with Him?? No sane, honest, truth seeking person, would be asked to only worship his maker alone, and only take Him for a god, and yet would counter that call by claiming that he only worshiped other creatures like himself, to please His maker!

Christians, for example, would insist that they only worship one god! But when asked to identify that god, they would name three distinct beings: The father, the son and the holy ghost, and then tell you that they are all but one 'Triune god', which basically translates into an instance where $1 = 3$! So no matter what they wish to call themselves, the truth is they do worship more than one god, and they do raise some of the Lord's creatures up to the level that is only worthy of Him alone! Some sects of Christianity, in fact, worship countless gods, the aforementioned three, in addition to Mary and every priest they choose to canonize as a saint, and dedicate a church where people would worship him or her in particular!

So when it comes to religion and actual adherence to it, what matters is the truth of what it is you're doing, not what you would like to call it! And while a naturalist, or someone who adheres to the doctrine of naturalism, would not identify themselves as followers of a religion, truth of the matter is they are, in fact, every bit as religious about their beliefs as those who come from different doctrines and religions! If you believe that nature is all there is, all there was and all there ever will be (or to put it in Carl Sagan's words: The cosmos is all there is, all there ever was, and all there ever will be), then THAT's your religious faith! You would adhere to it despite the stark contradictions it implies, and despite the fact that you know you cannot even begin to prove it to be true, no matter what you do! So if that's not faith, with the proportions and qualities of what others embrace in their religions, then there is no such thing as faith or religion!

This notion is quite essential to the question in hand, since as we shall see, the problem is not just with the use of the term 'religion' here, but also with the term 'science'! Science is supposed to be taken as one thing, and naturalism as another thing altogether! However, naturalistic beliefs have been driving the western scientific enterprise ever since the founding of the western academy back at the times of Pre-Socratic Greece.

So if you wish to come up with the correct answer to this question, once you've embraced the one true religion; Islam, then you need to make a clear and unambiguous distinction between true science, and naturalistic beliefs! We Muslims have no problem whatsoever with true science! By 'true science' in this context I mean every claim about nature that can be shown, beyond any reasonable doubt, to match reality! Such knowledge, once attained, then there's no way you'll find it to contradict authentic Islamic scripture! And we're prepared to challenge anyone, anywhere, to come up with a single instance where such contradiction did occur. Our problem, however, is with naturalism, and the way it passes under the tag of science! I would not be exaggerating if I said that it's the single most elaborately and exquisitely disguised and mischaracterized religion in all human history! No other doctrine in the history of metaphysical beliefs and religious methodological commitments has ever been so spectacularly covered under an academic practice of research and inquiry that purports to have nothing to do with the metaphysical whatsoever! I can think of very few other major deceptions of which entire nations have fallen victim!

Every western philosopher, when asked about naturalism, would give some vague definition that would leave you wondering about what beliefs, if any, would count under that definition as naturalistic! Even someone like Alvin Plantinga, a famous Christian philosopher and theologian, defines naturalism as the belief that there is no God, or anything like God! However, that's atheism, not naturalism! So his definition is not as inclusive as it should be! The Oxford dictionary, on the other hand, would define naturalism as 'the philosophical belief that everything arises from natural properties and causes, and supernatural or spiritual explanations are excluded or discounted'. And that's fine, except naturalists don't just exclude or discount the supernatural; they deny it categorically, or, to use the technical term: ontologically.

The problem with such a definition, thus, is that it renders naturalism as the belief that all scientists should embrace! Now it seems perfectly reasonable that if, for instance, I'm going to the lab to test certain causal regularities that I expect to hold true every time they're tested, then I have no business proposing or even considering supernatural causes! That's not what natural science is about, and it's not what one goes to the lab to examine. It's about such causes that can, in principle, be observed and induced. But then again, Naturalists would not allow for the very idea of something to happen due to anything but 'natural causes', in the sense that they should be testable and examinable, like everything they go to the lab to test and examine! That's what they would call 'Methodological Naturalism', and it obviously stems from the belief that nature is all there is, and that only a regress of natural causes

has ever existed. They would only take it on faith, and nothing else! An extremely reductionist and irrational faith at that!

If indeed there's no cause but the natural cause, then it would be okay, in principle, to believe that the world never had a beginning at all! The world as we know it, had always been there! And if indeed there is no cause but the natural cause, and some adherent to that belief, assumed a certain equation of gravity to have held true from eternity past, and found that in doing so, the equation would imply that the world must've evolved in a certain steady manner, then you would start to think: Hey, if that's true then the world as we know it couldn't have always been there, right? Perhaps for some reason, the naturalist would find it favorable to toy around with the equation, in his boundless, unconditional application of it to all events in the past, to yield some point in the far past where the world must have been nothing but a tiny spec that just blew up!

Now, is this type of reasoning, by any means, to be called science? Does it qualify as 'true science', in any reasonable sense? The answer, I'm afraid, is no! This is pure naturalistic myth making! You choose to believe that some law of nature must've held true from eternity past, and then you start wondering what kind of a past world this would imply, given the presumed eternity of other laws as well. You'd do that with no belief in any ontological restriction whatsoever, because you believe that nature and natural causes are all there is, all there's ever was, and all there ever will be! The very idea that some fundamentally and categorically different kind of causes may have taken hold of the world back at the time of its origins, is simply not allowed in your religion! The law of gravity

must have taken effect in the world from eternity, or at least from the point where it all started to become the way we know it today, because that's your faith, that's what you choose to believe! If you chose not to accept the cosmological principle, or the principle of uniformity to have held true from eternity past, then you've defeated the entire project of cosmology, and the entire practice of theorizing about the origins! Do that, and you're no longer welcome in the western academy as a 'scientist'! Perhaps not even as a philosopher! How dare you question the basic tenets of methodological naturalism, without which no such theories would have been possible, and no claim of science would've ever been made about them??

Believing that there's something beyond nature as we know it that is not of this world, and that there are causes out there that are not to be categorized as 'natural'; this is sheer blasphemy in the Western Academy, not because it can be proven false, or because it flies in the face of evidence, but because it goes against the religious tenets upon which entire disciplines of modern science have been founded! It's precisely because they cannot prove it that they would expel you, perhaps even exile you for challenging it! And what religion would that be?

Yep, you got it: **Naturalism!**

So to conclude, does 'religion' conflict with 'science'? Our answer would be: If by religion you mean the true religion, and by science you mean naturalism and its theories, then that's a conflict between true religion and false religion, and everybody should see it for what it is! If, however, you mean true science, or such

justifiable claims about observable reality that can be obtained through 'the scientific method', then no of course, true religion does not and cannot conflict with that in any way! True religion is the only authoritative source of knowledge when it comes to the ultimately unseen (all that exists beyond our human ability to observe)! It's authority comes from the fact that true revelation is knowledge delivered straight from the creator of all that exists! No truer account of reality can be sought after, and any claim that ventures beyond the observable under the banner of science, is, by definition, a false naturalistic application of the scientific method! A religious practice par excellence!

You wish to learn about the origins of the world and how it came to be, or the origins of life on earth? Consult the scripture of Islam, and go no further! Do not fetch such knowledge in 'science', because it's not even science to begin with! Theorists who apply the scientific method to such questions, are doing what their religion is teaching them to do; their FALSE religion! The belief that there is no cause, anywhere, but the 'natural cause', is a religious belief! The belief that whatever natural laws we observe in this part of the universe, should hold true everywhere else, is a religious belief! The belief that natural laws are eternal, unless it can be shown in some 'scientific model' that they are not; is a religious belief! I say religious because, by definition, they occupy that place of faith where followers of other religions would hold beliefs about the supernatural and the metaphysical! They are designed specifically to replace such beliefs!

And like all false religions, they are both, irrational and indemonstrable, and are indeed the cause for the problem of

underdetermination of theory by observation that modern science is known to suffer in many of its disciplines!

I say they are irrational because we know by necessity that causes (natural or otherwise) cannot regress to eternity, and that there must be a point where natural causes are preceded by supernatural ones, and where natural laws as we know them do not hold, since we know by the same necessity that nature as we know it is not all there is, or all there ever was, and the same is true of time! You have to be an ardent naturalist to believe otherwise!

And I say they are responsible for the problem of underdetermination, because naturally, if the subject matter of your hypothesis is absolutely unobservable, then no matter what you do – applying the scientific method – in attempt to validate it, you will be reasoning in circles, taking your hypotheses themselves through arbitrary interpretation, as evidence for their own validity! Whatever observation you choose to interpret in service of your theory, would be self-confirming and circular by necessity, since you would know that no one has ever observed a similar case, or ever will! If indeed nobody had ever witnessed a world like ours, for example, having existed forever, or being created from something else, or whatever, then nothing a theorist would propose about the origins of this world could ever be determined by observation to be true, or even to be more plausible than other competing theories! You would look at different observations, astronomical or otherwise, and say: This is what I expect to see if my theory was true! It is so because my theory is true! However, this may well be exactly what you should expect to see if it was not! How can you tell? There's a common fallacy in the literature of

critical thinking and modern logic that goes by the name 'Affirming the consequent', that sounds just like this!

- If A then B
- B
- then A!

However, It may well be true that if C then B, and if D then B! If you've never seen any similar cases from which an observational experience would help you infer the best explanation by omitting the less likely cases, as in having seen a great many cases where A causes B, rather than C or D, then what grounds could you possibly have to believe in A? And what about X, or Y or Z, or other explanations you couldn't even begin to imagine, that may indeed be true?? What reason could you possibly have to dismiss them in favor of A? None! All you would have is the arbitrary choice to interpret all observations in a manner that confirms A! And when asked to provide evidence in support of A, you would only offer those interpretations themselves, in sheer circularity! I can explain A by B, therefore B is evidence for A!

This is why in many areas of natural science today you would find the most irrelevant reasons for accepting theory in the academic domain, being taken seriously to provide epistemic grounds for belief in whatever the naturalist wishes to believe! A theory would be preferred to another because its mathematics are more 'elegant', or because it has more 'predictions' (and by predictions they would mean a greater number of observations that can be interpreted in a fitting manner!), or because it fits better with other similar theories that have been accepted for the same feeble

reasons! The so called Occam razor would appeal to many in such cases, although the only grounds it might have in claiming that the theory with the least number of ontological hypotheses is more likely to be true, are exactly the grounds that are missing in questions of origins, and other ultimately inaccessible questions to human experience: previous induction of similar cases! How do you know that the theory with less assumptions is more likely to be true, and according to what previous experience, exactly, would you appeal to such a notion, when it comes to worlds coming into being, for example?? None whatsoever! Nothing but wishful thinking!

No matter how much you believe it to be true, or how elegant and well versed its mathematical and geometrical model may be, a theory proposed in areas where no human experience is possible or attainable, will never be anything more than naturalist mythology! No better than the myths of creation adhered to by those tribesmen dancing around the fire, praying to a totem in the forests of Africa! The only source of reliable knowledge in such questions is true revelation from The Creator Himself! Otherwise, a naturalist myth is no better than any other myth! Call it science all you want, that would not change the truth about its epistemic status, not a single bit!

So before you go on to preach about 'religion' being incompatible with 'science', tell us exactly what it is that you would call religion, and what religions you would dismiss as ancient myth, and why, and tell us what criteria you have, on the other hand, in determining what qualifies as good science and what does not, and in the process, try to be as honest as you possibly can, if you really

wish to end up believing in the truth, and nothing but the truth, for only those who are honest and sincere will be made to see the truth for what it is, and the falsehood for what it is.